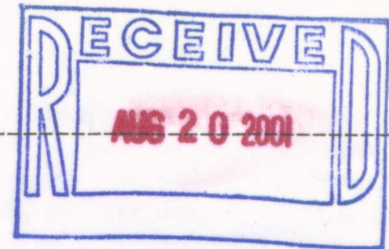


Giles James Sheldon
1830

Re: Giles James Sheldon

Sat, Jul 21, 2001 8:37 PM

From: "Nancy Anderson" <blueh@earthlink.net>
To: Betty Allen <allenb@unh.edu>
Date: Sat, Jul 21, 2001, 8:35 PM
Subject: Re: Giles James Sheldon



Betty,

I received your information in the mail today about Giles James Sheldon. Thank you for sending it to me. I will mail the medical journal article to you, and also a copy of an article published in Norway Tidings about the Sheldon family. An interesting note, his brother, George Washington Sheldon, also became a doctor.

I also found the note about his last residence and place of death interesting. Perhaps someone mixed him up with another Giles Sheldon. Dr. Giles James Sheldon, MD, Attorney, and Justice of the Peace, was born on May 12, 1806 on his father's farm near Norway, Herkimer County, New York. In 1853 he moved to Minnesota with his second wife Margaret. He lived in Minnesota for the rest of his life. He enjoyed traveling, so he did visit New York and a number of other places during his life. He had a farm in Minnesota, which his family helped him maintain. I have a copy of his death certificate, which states that he died May 25, 1880, in Mound Prairie Township, Houston County, Minnesota, age 74 years and 13 days. His father's name was Caleb Sheldon Jr. and his mother's name was Rebecca Giles. The reference in your records stating that his last place of residence and place of death as being Holland Patent is incorrect. He did die in 1880, but he died at home in Minnesota and is buried in the family cemetery on the family farm (the farm is still owned by the Sheldon family). (At least my great great grandfather, Dr. Giles James Sheldon died in Minnesota.) I am assuming he is the same one listed in your class records from Union College, since apparently he wrote in his journals that this is where he attended college. I just wanted to confirm the information that Ruth Tannenbaum gave you in her letter of inquiry to you - that Dr. Sheldon did indeed die in Minnesota, not in New York.

Thank you again for your assistance. I will get the copies of these two articles put in the mail to you in the next few days.

If anyone else inquires about Dr. Sheldon, a good place for them to write would be to the Houston County Historical Society in Houston County, Minnesota. Since Dr. Sheldon was the first doctor in Houston County, Minnesota, information about him and his family is written up in the Houston County History book.

Nancy J. Anderson

Sat, Jul 21, 2001 8:37 PM

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>From: Betty Allen <allenb@union.edu>
>To: <bluehunj@earthlink.net>
>Subject: Giles James Sheldon
>Date: Tue, Jul 17, 2001, 6:05 AM
>
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>
> I mailed to you today the information we have in our collection
>about Giles James Sheldon. There is not a lot of information about him
so
>if you could please mail me the article from the Minnesota Medical
Journal
>about him, I would appreciate it. The article will go in Mr. Sheldon's
>alumni file here in Special Collections. I am not able to receive
>attachments through my e-mail.

```
>Betty Allen
>Special Collections
>Schaffer Library
>Union College
>Schenectady, NY 12308
>(518)388-6620
>allenb@union.edu
>
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we have in our collection
a lot of information about him
from the Minnesota Medical
article will go in Mr. Sheldon's
I am not able to receive

A Backwoods Doctor Giles James Sheldon, First Practicing Physician In Houston County on the Minnesota Frontier Historical Vignette

RUTH J. MANN, B.S.* and
JACK D. KEY, M.A., M.S.†

Giles James Sheldon, M.D. wrote in his occasional journal, December 12, 1867: "Pleasant day,—sun shines; Children in school—I am reading medical works—" (Figure 1).

He left no further record of what he was reading that day, but his words create a pleasing picture, probably of rare occurrence for those times. Doctor Sheldon was the first regular M.D. to practice in southeastern Minnesota, and he had little leisure. For a frontier doctor, however, Sheldon had a fine medical library. Many of his books have been kept, as well as his diaries and account books. These books and documents, which have been given to the Mayo Library by the Sheldon family, present a sparsely descriptive but authentic picture of medical practice in rural Minnesota in the 1850s through the 1870s.

In 1850, Daniel Drake had written that he had seen the Upper Mississippi to the mouth of the Fever River, but from that point on to the Falls of St. Anthony there were only a few villages and two military posts. Since Drake as a medical topographer was only interested in populated areas, he did not attempt to study or describe the region.²

By 1851, however, settlers had begun to pour into Minnesota. A steamboat pilot, in his reminiscences,³ recalled that every river boat could make money from 1852 to 1857 because there were not enough boats to carry the people who wanted to come to this newly opened farmers' and lumbermen's paradise.

Brownsville, founded in 1848 by Sam Brown, was the first landing on the river in

Minnesota. It was here that the history of regular medical practice in southeastern Minnesota began.

On June 27, 1853, Giles James Sheldon, M.D. (1806-1880), and his family, traveling on the Mississippi river boat, *The Doctor Franklin*, arrived at Wild Cat Landing, near Brownsville, Territory of Minnesota. For \$400 they purchased and settled on the 320 acre Samuel McPhail claim at Big Spring, two and a half miles west. There was a Winnebago Indian village and council house about 40 miles away, 1½ miles from the present site of Rushford.^{4,5} The advice Benjamin Rush gave to medical graduates in New England in 1789,⁶ to establish themselves as soon as possible on a farm was a practical necessity on the Minnesota frontier in 1853. In spite of the speculative land boom and influx of settlers, the country was still thinly populated. There were only about 20 medical doctors in the territory, mostly in the Fort Snelling area. They were, however, a vigorous, forward looking group. The first medical society in the Territory, christened "The Minnesota Medical Society" (later the Minnesota State Medical Association) was organized on July 23, 1853 in St. Paul.⁷ There is no record of Doctor Sheldon's participating in the Society's activities, even though he would have been qualified for membership. On October 2, 1856, the Big Spring farm was sold to John Mullen and on November 2, 1856, the Sheldons moved to Mound Prairie on the



Fig. 1 - Doctor Giles James Sheldon. Photograph taken at Hokah, Minnesota, July 10, 1873, by 18-year-old boy artist.

*Assistant Professor of Medical History, Mayo Medical School, and History of Medicine Librarian (Retired).

†Associate Professor of Biomedical Communications, Mayo Medical School, and Librarian, Mayo Foundation, Rochester, Minnesota.

Root River where they had land. (This farm considered today as the Sheldon family farm is operated by Sumner and Ruth Sheldon, the third generation to do so. In its nearly 130 year history, this Sheldon farm has never been rented, mortgaged, or tax delinquent.)⁵

Giles James Sheldon was born May 12, 1806, on his father's farm, near Norway, Herkimer County, in central New York state. He was the oldest child of Caleb, Jr. and Rebecca Giles Sheldon. His family was of English extraction, descended from one of three Sheldon brothers, officers in Cromwell's army, who had fled to America in 1661 to escape the vengeance of Charles II.^{4,5}

According to the "In Memoriam" in Sheldon's journal, two of his six siblings died of tuberculosis. Clotilda Sheldon, born 1808, died in 1829 of consumption. A brother, born January 20, 1818, died June 1819, with "Scrophula of glands of jaw and neck." Giles, himself was "sickly" as a child, and consequently received his early education from his mother at home. He began his formal education at fourteen at Fairfield Academy, Fairfield, N.Y. on February 5, 1821, then under the administration of Charles Avery, principal. Irregular attendance because of poor health made Sheldon's academic career more interrupted and longer than was usual for the day. He enrolled at Union College, Schenectady, N.Y. in April, 1827, to study theology. This institution, under the presidency of Eliphalet Nott (1773-1866), had an excellent scholastic reputation. Nott's students were allowed a larger measure of self-government than was common in American colleges at the time. Also, a scientific course of study was offered as an alternative to the traditional classical curriculum. In this atmosphere, Sheldon became interested in studying medicine as well as theology. But 1828 found him back on his father's farm, recuperating. In the fall, he was able to re-enter Fairfield Academy, and found employment as an usher. Offered more money by the trustees of Camden Academy, Camden, N.Y. (\$350.00 annual stipend), Sheldon went there in June, 1829, but could work for only nine months. Following an episode of hemoptysis, he spent most of the next year (1830) at home under the nursing care of his mother and sisters. Doctor Westel Willoughby of Newport was one of his physicians (Doctor Jonathan Sherwood the other). Later that same year, having regained his health, Sheldon re-enrolled at Union College, received his B.S. degree, and also became a member of Phi Beta Kappa fraternity. After a short, pleasant recreational trip

to New York and Philadelphia, his health seemed much improved. In 1831, he began the study of medicine with Doctor Shadrach Vincent at Fairfield, N.Y. During the years 1831 to 1833, inclusive, he also studied botany, chemistry and medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Western District of the State of New York, at Fairfield, locally called Fairfield Medical School. In 1809, the trustees of the Fairfield Academy had founded a medical school, which was granted a charter by the state legislature in 1812, as the College of the Physicians and Surgeons of the Western District of the State of New York. The first class had been graduated in 1816. By the time of Sheldon's attendance, the school was well established, and had a good reputation.^{4,5,8,9}

The botany lectures Sheldon attended were given by Doctor Asa Gray (1810-1888), also a Fairfield graduate. It was in remembrance of these days, that years later, Sheldon bought a copy of Gray's much praised *A Manual of the Botany of the Northern United States*, 1848 (Figure 2). On the fly lead, below the price, \$1.75, Sheldon wrote: "I

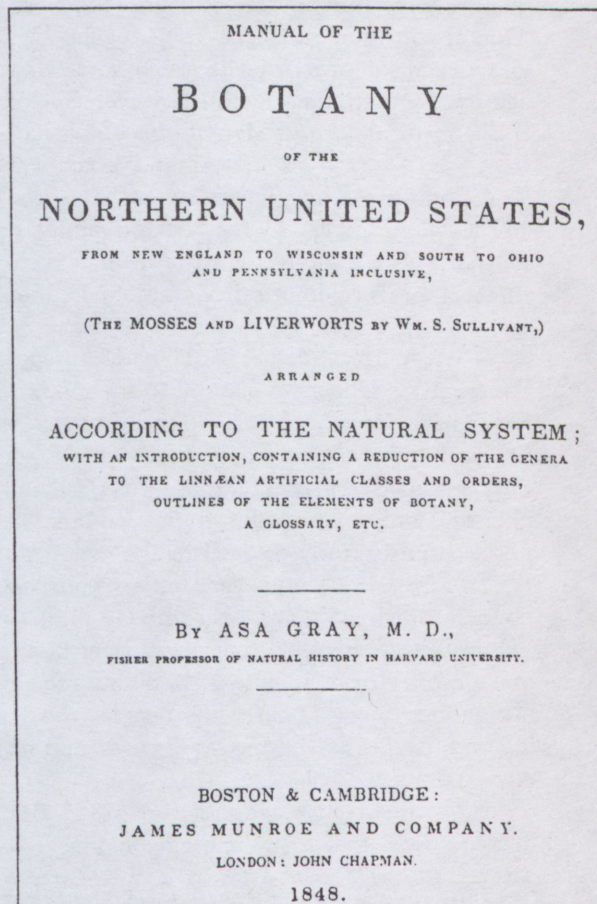


Fig. 2 - Title page Asa Gray *A Manual of the Botany of the Northern United States*, 1848.

bought this Book because it was written by Asa Gray whose Lectures I attended at Fairfield Medical College about the year 1832 . . . P.S. It does not equal my expectations: still Gray was a good botanist. He loved this branch of study—"

The year 1832 was supposed to be Sheldon's year of travel and study at the Paris hospitals. An epidemic of Asiatic cholera in Paris made him change his plans. In October, he began a second course of lectures at the medical school. He received instruction in anatomy and physiology from James McNaughton, and on completion received certificate No. 165, dated October 30, 1833.

While Sheldon was in attendance at the school, there were a number of other prominent physicians on the faculty, who must have had considerable influence upon him. Doctor James Hadley (1785-1869),¹⁰ was the Professor of Chemistry and Materia Medica from the school's first course of lectures, 1813 to its dissolution in 1840. For many years, Hadley was the only faculty member resident in Fairfield, and on him fell the responsibility of the tasks involved with the business managements of the College. Sheldon kept his college notes on Hadley's lectures, 1833. The more serious matters are interspersed with personal observations—for instance, "Puts his specs on." In the lecture on magnetism, Sheldon noted gleefully "His bowl leaks and water runs all over the table."

A professor whose reputation was more than local, and whose teachings probably influenced Sheldon's later career was Theodorick Romeyn Beck (1791-1855).¹¹ Beck and two of his five brothers earned distinction in the field of medicine. He was the author, in 1823, of the first authoritative book on medical jurisprudence published in the United States, a subject on which he had lectured at the Western College of Physicians and Surgeons at Fairfield from 1815. He continued to teach at Fairfield until 1840.

Doctor Westel Willoughby was not only Sheldon's Professor of Obstetrics during medical school, he was also one of his preceptors. In 1833 (January 30), Sheldon began to "read" with Doctors Coon and Booth, but after about three months he went to Willoughby at Newport, with whom he remained as a student-boarder until winter, when he returned to Fairfield to attend formal lectures again. Sheldon took his M.D. degree the 21st of January, 1834, one of 55 out of 217 University medical students who did so.

During the early years of his professional career, Doctor Sheldon was itinerant (Figure 3). He



Fig. 3 - Giles J. Sheldon's profile, June 28, 1837, by J. DaSee.

practiced in his native New York State until 1837 when he went to Ogle County, Illinois. Here he remained for almost three years, before going to Amanda, Ohio. At Amanda, he met and married Elizabeth H. Cullom (June 9, 1841). He continued to practice but was also engaged, for a short time, with his brother, George Washington, in a farming venture in Mercer County, Ohio, December, 1841. In April 1849, the family moved to another farm north of Celina, Mercer County.

Sheldon was a man who loved to travel. In his younger days, he once sailed on a coastal ship to Nova Scotia to see the tides in the Bay of Fundy.⁵ In 1837, he and his brother George "commenced our tour of the West, walking across Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and crossing into Iowa at Ft. Madison on December 1st." Late in life, Doctor Sheldon traveled to San Francisco, Oregon and Washington. The last entry concerning this kind of travel appears in his diary under the date October 9, 1876.

—off to the Centennial. Arrived Philadelphia on 11th and 12th began the mighty show. Had \$39.80 round trip

ticket to Philadelphia and return by New York City, up the Hudson through Canada to Detroit, Chicago and home on October 23.

Elizabeth, Sheldon's wife, died May 8, 1850, and his son, Eugene Caleb, died May 10, 1850. Giles James, Jr. and Elizabeth were the surviving children of the first marriage. On November 19, 1850, he married Mrs. Margaret Roberts. Giles and Margaret Sheldon had five children: Celina A., Henry R., Sumner S., Florence N., and Julia A. Apparently, the practice of medicine and running a farm were not sufficient activity for Sheldon at this restless period in his life. Another interest was needed. In his copy of Blackstone's *Commentaries* (1847) he wrote: "I, James Sheldon, M.D. and A.B.—was admitted to the Bar as Attorney at Law and Solicitor in chancery for the State of Ohio.

August 5, 1852

AEs. 46 years

Celina, Mercer Co.,—Ohio—"

One biographical comment notes that Doctor Sheldon was admitted to the bar "with the finest paper ever written before the examining Judge."⁵

The next year, on April 28, 1853, the family of G. James Sheldon, Margaret Sheldon, his wife, Giles James Sheldon, Jr., Elizabeth Catherine Rebecca Sheldon and Celina America Sheldon started from Celina, Ohio for the West.

Four barrels of Doctor Sheldon's books were moved with them. His medical library was much larger than that of the average pioneer physician, and he had also kept the books he had used in his early educational years. Authors in his library whose works were presumably added before 1826 and from notes in books long enjoyed by him included Cicero, Horace, Tacitus, Virgil. The most interesting title in this group, acquired in 1824, was the first American edition of the New Testament printed in Greek, edited by Caleb Alexander, printed by Isaac Thomas, Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1800 (Figure 4).

Of course, many books acquired during his medical studies were of lasting value to a practicing physician in the 1850s-1860s. Some of the books bear notations of where and when they were purchased. Boyer's *French Dictionary*, 1827, was bought in the City of Utica, October 26, 1828, probably in anticipation of the journey to France that was never taken. Samuel Cooper's *A Dictionary of Practical Surgery*, 1830, was bought in the

City of New York, 1831. The copy of John Murray's *A System of Materia Medica and Pharmacy*, 1828, has the inscription, Fairfield, 1831. The first volume of John Bell's *Anatomy of the Human Body* has a bookplate of Wm. Todd and date, 1835.

Doctor Sheldon enhanced his medical education throughout his life by continuing to buy and study the best and latest medical books available. Several editions of William P. Dewees' works on midwifery and diseases of females were added in the 1840s. These purchases probably demonstrated the frequency of obstetric and gynecologic problems in his patients.

His copy of the *Dispensatory of the United States of America*, was the fourth edition of 1839. Robley Dunglison's (1798-1869), *New Remedies: The Method of Preparing and Administering Them; Their Effects on the Healthy and Diseased*

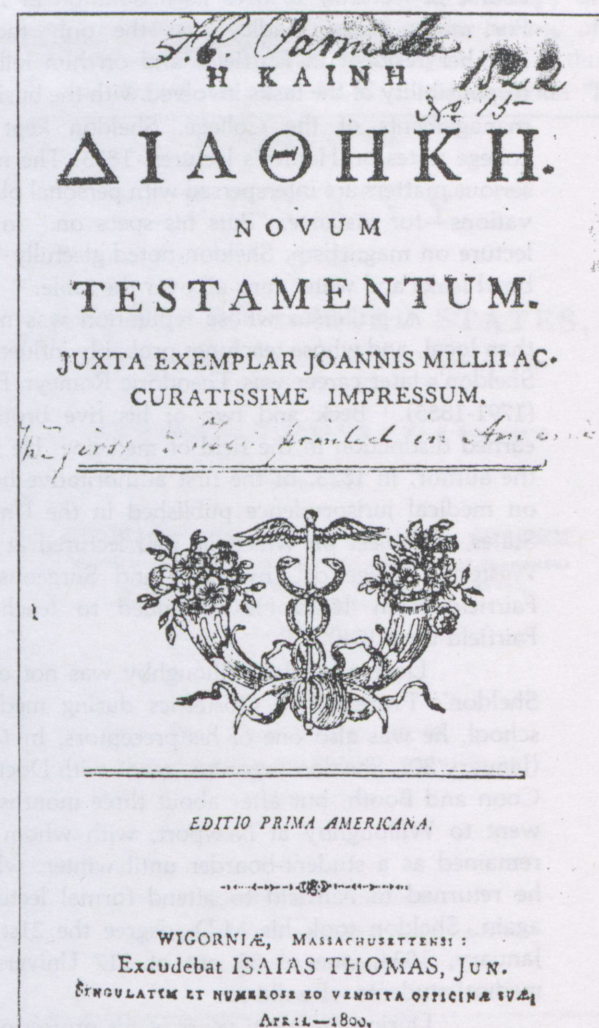


Fig. 4 - Title page of New Testament in Greek edited by Caleb Alexander, 1800.

Economy and etc., 1841, was purchased in Cincinnati in 1854. Robert Gooch (1784-1830), *An Account of Some of the Most Important Diseases Peculiar to Women*, 1836, was also purchased in Cincinnati. Sheldon wrote on the fly leaf "a most admirable work." The four volume *The Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine*, edited by John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie, John Conolly, revised by Robley Dunglison, 1847, was being used in 1848, and was probably the closest Doctor Sheldon could come, in many cases, to a professional consultation on the Minnesota frontier. For example, May 4, 1868: "On my return from S. Anderson's where I was attending his wife, sick with ovarian abscess which I opened in Sacro-ischiatic notch—2 qts of Pus escaping." Several days later, he wrote that the "went to bed but could not sleep, too warm, couldn't stand it and got up, wrote this and then went to reading about Abscess in the *Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine*.

An incomplete, *The Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal*, for 1804-1808 was the only periodical remaining in the Sheldon collection, although he always subscribed to at least one medical periodical as well as an Eastern newspaper. Books of purely recreational interest apparently were not included in this collection. Two works on botany, the book by Asa Gray and Robert E. Griffith's *Medical Botany*, 1847, were both read and used. Books of more general scientific interest included Josiah C. Nott's *Types of Mankind*, 1854, by Sheldon's former professor in theology at Union College, and Sir Charles Lyell's *Elements of Geology*, 1849.

Observations in Sheldon's journals show not only the relevance of his past professional training and reading to his continuing education, but also the persistent effort he made to keep informed. Jeremiah Day (1773-1867), professor of mathematics at Yale, was the author of a text on mathematics Sheldon studied at Union College. Sheldon read Hubbard's¹² account of the post mortem on Day, presented to the Connecticut Medical Society, 1868, with interest and insight, probably making comparison with his own experience. He quoted it in a journal entry in October 1868 headed Consumption.

Jeremiah Day, . . . prof. Math, Yale College, was a feeble youth bled from the lungs, was bled, took digitalis, went to Bermuda, came home to die etc. But Doctor . . . cured him with Irons and

Calisayo Bark and good living. He survived to the age of 95. Post mortem examination: the chest: in the Apex of each lung was found a double corrugated circular cicatrix, an inch and a half or more in diameter. Also a third cicatrix on the left side of the left lung a few inches below the apex. The vomicae had been deep and of long duration. The active period was twelve years and its whole period 75 years. This is a legible record, surpassing in interest and importance to the human race those of the slabs of Ninevah or the Runic inscriptions. He was born in 1781 and died August 1867 - This is an important and encouraging case-

Two books from which Sheldon had studied law: Herbert Broom's *A Selection of Legal Maxims*, 1852, and the 21st edition of Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (adopted to the work of the American student by John L. Wendell 1847) must have been of great practical importance to him. During the first years of his residence in Minnesota, Sheldon gave his neighbors legal counsel and advice, without fee. He also made use of his experience in surveying. As a result, according to his grandson, Houston County was remarkably free from political quarrels and factional feuding that often mars the first steps to organized county government. On April 4, 1854, Sheldon was elected the county's first Judge of Probate and also served as presiding judge of the first court at the county seat. He was several times a County Commissioner, Court Commissioner and County Coroner. He also "surveyed, and platted . . . the village of San Jacinto, and helped to secure for it a post office, and in the same period of the fifties he platted the village of Sheldon, in Sheldon Township"¹³ (Figure 5). Doctor Sheldon treated George Canon, San Jacinto's first postmaster, during a long illness. When Canon found he could no longer carry on his responsibilities as Postmaster, he simply turned everything over to Sheldon who took the few stamps, etc. home and "acted as a sort of Deputy." In time, Doctor Sheldon was appointed to the office and served until the San Jacinto Post Office closed January 19, 1871.

This then was the educational and cultural background of the man contentedly reading his medical books in 1867. His journals, or as he called them, memorabilia, covering years December, 1853-

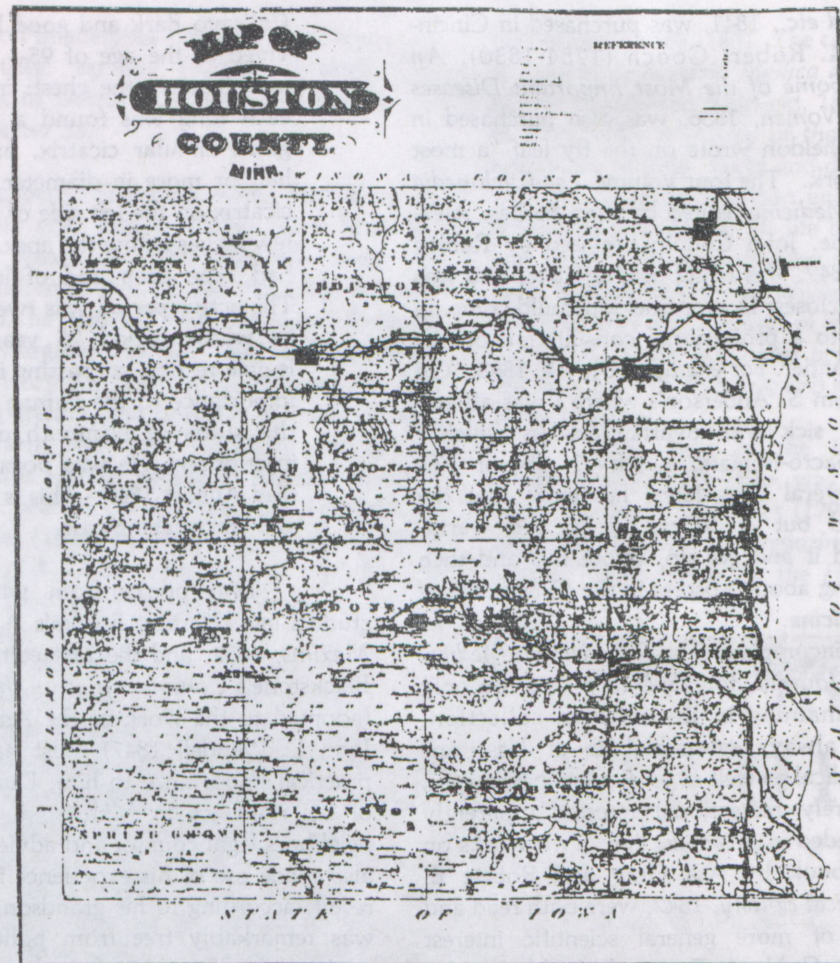


Fig. 5 - Map of Houston County, Minnesota. In An Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota. Chicago, A.T. Andreas, 1874, p. 148.

January 1869, show an educated, able individual, admirable in energy, courage and ingenuity, well established in his triple career as farmer, judge and physician. Management of the family farm is the predominant interest in his journal entries, which detail the extremes of weather, conditions of the crops, prices received for the produce. For some years, especially those of the Civil War, Sheldon did not practice on a regular basis. However, his response to the obligations of his first profession, regardless of difficulties or unpleasantness, was impeccable. And as his sons from his second marriage matured and took over farm responsibilities, he saw more and more patients.

Some of Sheldon's comments on current events are of great interest still. One of the most stirring events of Minnesota pioneer history was the Sioux uprising, which began August 15, 1862. There was a strange ripple effect of this in Houston

County. Sheldon termed it Strange Incident!

A.D. 1862 Strange Incident!

September 2nd (Tuesday)

Yesterday, Sept. 1st, a panic of a serious character filled the road with ox and horse wagons filled with terror. Stricken men, women, and children many also without hat or coat hastened on intent on self preservation.

I inquired the cause they said the Indians (2,000 or more) had burned Preston in Fillmore Co. Minn. and after murdering all the people for miles, and were then not far from Houston (6 miles above us) and were pouring into Sheldon.

They said the danger was great. I hastened to the house and ordered Ma and the children to join the multitude and hasten on towards Hokah and La Cross. Poor creatures how sad to leave our house and all we possessed to the knife and the firebrand.

We took some bread and cheese and a few clothes with \$30 to \$40 of money and commended ourselves to providence. Libby was on the hill teaching school I sent a horse for her and to get news.

D.G. North went.

When they returned they harnessed to the wagon, filled it with beds, clothes and oats, cheese etc. and started for Hokah. Libby and Orren (our hired boy) met me on my return. I went with them to Mr. Woolleys where my wife and children were. In the evening we started for La Cross in Wis. but fortunately met two teams of wheat from Riceford 30 miles west towards Preston. They (one the P.M. of Riceford) assured us it was a hoax got up by two wretches for some vicious purpose.

The years immediately before and during the Civil War were very difficult for Sheldon. He had great sympathy for the Negro slaves and held a deep antagonism to the southern slave owners. He was often indignant with the politicians in Washington. In 1861 he questioned: "Is Lincoln fool, coward or traitor? I believe him unequal to the requirements of his station." In 1863 he proclaimed, "I am a war democrat to the last ditch!"

On February 28, 1862, G. James Sheldon, Jr. enlisted as a volunteer in Company I of the Wisconsin Cavalry. Months passed before the family heard anything from Jimmy, although they knew the company had been in action in Arkansas during August. On October 12 they were overjoyed to have him come home on leave unannounced. They were shocked at his physical condition. Four months out of the eight he had been sick. "Benton Barracks," his father wrote, "has nearly taken his life. He has chronic diarrhea and chronic bronchitis." Jimmy's subsequent military career was not recorded by his father, except for a note in his journal dated 1863: "Dec. 16 & 17th are hard winter days. Snow from the NE & N with heavy wind fell 12 inches deep, 16' below 0. Jimmy is away to

Rochester to get exempted from the draft if he can on account of ill health. He has not recovered from his first campaign." Beginning in May, 1863 Doctor William Worrall Mayo (1819-1911) was the examining surgeon of the enrollment board for the First Minnesota District. If Doctor Mayo examined Jimmy Sheldon (and this is just a possibility) that was the only contact with Rochester, (and indirectly with Mayo) in the memorabilia. The outcome of the examination is unknown. Jimmy did survive the war, however, and eventually became a railroad locomotive engineer.

There is surprisingly little specific detail in the journal about Sheldon's practice of medicine—only modest, rather short accounts. But succinctness of description does not lessen vitality: Entry dated September 7th (1868) reads:

When I got home I found a messenger had come for me in the morning to go to Preacher Smith's to consult with Doctor Pope as to the treatment of a compound fracture of said Smith's right leg—Tibia and fibula both broke 6 in. above the ankle—the fibula having cut through the integuments, stocking and boot. He had lain 17 days and the bones not set—the limb gangrenous in spots from pressure of knot and strings, etc. I remained over night and worked over the limb till 4 p.m. of the 7th when it looked better anyhow.

I used the *spica* bandage etc. Pope had at first put the limb into a box or trough made of three boards. The heel had suffered and Smith could not bear the pain. And the box had to be discarded.

Sheldon was conventional in his methods, and followed therapies and procedures that he had been taught. He defended the practice of bleeding, as parts of his defense against the irregular practitioners. He used the standard medicines of the day. However, the few cases reported seem to show a conservative approach; radical or depletion methods were not used. For instance, this entry sounds like a means of reinforcing his own opinion: "Calomel is not better than Bismuth or Magnesia for sores—Tannin acts well as a dry remedy."

Doctor Sheldon's most effective therapy must have been the reassurance of his presence. He gave this generously. It was commonplace,

according to his journals, for him to stay overnight, several days or longer, with one of his patients. His professional fees for this were modest. In 1861, he stayed in with a patient from November 22 to December 2. The total charge was \$25.00 for everything.

In August 1868, he noted "On the 13th I was called in night to visit Mrs. John Crich—gone two nights and two days." The succeeding entry makes it plain that this absence must have been right in the middle of the wheat harvest. Sheldon did not mention this, but on the same page wrote: "My sons, Henry and Sumner, are fine, good, industrious boys"—obviously knowing himself fortunate to have such help.

What might have been partially personal dismay at his incapability of giving relief is sometimes released in peppery comment about poor treatment.

June 1st 1868. I went or was carried 16 miles through a heavy rain storm to see Mrs. S— one of Doctor Pope's patients, sick 3 ms with inflammation of the left eye. It is now staphylomatous.

It was considered neuralgia and treated badly. By such management she has now colitis and stomatitis and in Brain.

Know what the complaint really is before you open fire.

In his written remarks, he was free to voice his *skepticism* for some therapy. For example:

Jan. 5 Typhoid Fever. Rheumatism

By medical treatment—one in Six dies—By no medication, only ventilation, food or nursing, one in sixteen dies. Rheumatism gets well quicker without medicine.

Much of Doctor Sheldon's practice must have been grim as the following illustrates:

Jan. 7, 1869 (under heading: VARIOLA) In one month (December 1868) in Cincinnati there were 530 deaths. Of these 187 were found Small Pox!

Small Pox is prevailing now around and in Rushford, Fillmore County, Minnesota and already, I'm told, 37 have died. No wonder: they drink great quantities

of whiskey before and during the disease.

It is a popular belief that drinking is a preventative.

The Norwegians live in houses so tight that air is almost excluded and light is admitted only through one window. They roll up in woolen blankets—and keep their room (for generally there is but one) hot as a big stove can make it. I have now a family in which 5 or 6 are down with Small Pox (In Crystal Valley, Gunderson family—One I fear will die—delirious, eyes closed, etc.)

There was later added: "she died choked." A few pages further on the somber report is continued:

Small Pox

P.S. I have just returned from visiting Mr. Gunderson and family in Crystal Valley. I found 4 down with *Small Pox*—covered with pustules and vesicles from head to heel— One of the family caught it at Rushford about the 20th Dec. Ult. Keep cool, dark, abstain from meat, smear with oil (olive); use expect for cough and [cumifucfig racemoso?] if the symptoms became severe. Give freely of sulphuric acid, largely diluted with water—13 to pint of sweetened water if the case is confluent—pocks filled with bloody sanies

Sheldon felt no guilt about maintaining his Anglo-Saxon protestant attitudes. These were perhaps colored by relationships both medical and legal in his cases.

January, 1869.

These Christmas and New Years celebrations among the Irish and Norwegians have been rendered extremely interesting and happy by the free use of knife, fist and foot— Beer and whiskey have raised the Devil among them and now the Law is invoked by the sore heads to pour Oil into and over their bruised faces and kicked ribs— One came to me for a warrant—which I have not yet issued— His face looked like a roten ^(sic) pumpkin— Alcohol is

King and the Devil is prime minister— Man does seem to be totally depraved and will soon end in smoke.

Some of his journal entries are very vivid, sounding like a stream of consciousness, and recall his earlier intention to become a minister.

On the 5th of August at sunset a magnificent ball of fire passed over the farm and exploded in a terrific crash. Doctor Sheldon wrote "This is the month for the thunderstorms to visit the earth."

And for the next evening he wrote:

There! See, the rain is coming! Hurry Henry, Sumner, let us get another load of wheat—if we can top off this stack, then we will have *one* safe. We did hurry, got the load and finished the stack and began another. But the rain stopped us and the heavens are all covered with clouds and it rains, rains as if a night rain were setting in. Pretty condition our wheat and oats will be in! Lose half of it very likely and at the best it will have to be saved by the labor of opening shocks, setting up the down bundles, fussing, mussing, toiling, moiling, soiling, sweating, fretting, declaiming, and some thoughtless ones swearing. This is farming! Virgil calls it a happy life! I can't see it.

In spite of few personal remarks, Doctor Sheldon left in his journals, a vivid impression of a strong personality. Nevertheless, he was conscious of limitations. He was in his early sixties, an advanced age for the frontier. Flashes of despondency or questioning are found. He was ill more often.

He very intelligently wondered (January 25, 1869) if his excessive use of tobacco could be the chief cause of medical troubles. "But" he asked "how can I give it up? Have used it since six years of age."

For May 24, 1868, 12 days after his 62nd birthday, he wrote:

This evening I lost my first incisor tooth—the right middle one, lower jaw. My front teeth up to this time had shown few signs of age. But now the mark is palpable. This tooth had been loose for probably two years and I

spared and saved it. Now I fear for the rest. This is the Beginning of the End.

Doctor Sheldon's journals record his pulling of many teeth. "He used forceps very like modern tools, and in cases where there wasn't enough tooth left to provide a grip for forceps, he used an instrument called a turnkey. This turnkey looks just like a very small cant hook, such as loggers used to turn logs."⁵ Later entries in the journals on this subject note:

February 24, 1871, An old Indian (Winnebago), to extracting bicuspid teeth, \$.25. Credit, gift. He did flinch — yelped.

April 2, 1872, Indian Joe's (Winnebago) wife with her papoose came to my house this morning to get me to extract a molar tooth, lower jaw, right side. I cut around, hooked on, and tore out two instead of one. Gum held them together. It bled profusely. An Indian woman does feel, it hurt her. I gave tobacco and she started for her wigwam in the timber.

In October (1868), upon receiving news of the death of Hejah Mann, an admired friend of Fairfield days, and fellow member of the Calliopean Society, he wrote: "They are all passing away — these men of my youth."

In early December, 1868, he wrote "I am sick and have been for more than a week. Bil. Rhumen and chills, fever, can't sleep. Nursing the sick the cause." By December 7 he was beginning to feel better. "My health is mending. I began to sleep and have hopes of recovery." But it continued very cold, with deep snow on the ground, and he wrote: "How we long to escape from this inclement weather and climate."

Sheldon's professional services were needed in even the bitterest weather. On January 1, 1869, he dined at the Pope's and enjoyed a good supper and "two fine apples." The next morning, Doctors Pope and Sheldon drove 13 miles to Wm. Garret's—on whose wife, Sheldon "performed the operation of Paracentesis Abdominus, two inches below umbilicus, through 4 inches of Adeps and got 10 qts. greenish yellow fluid—looked like boiled milk. She fainted but soon recovered and bore the pain like an Indian—had to give freely of Wine — Had old liver and stomach troubles— Often vom-

GILES JAMES SHELDON, M.D. - MANN AND KEY

ited blood (haemotomicus) 60 years old—will not recover poor woman! Wishes to live, to return to Ohio. The sods of Minnesota, however, will soon gain the victory." Sheldon continued: "I charged only \$12 and he paid me joyfully, thankfully—"

He included a note on technique to himself.

N.B. Look to your Trocar before you begin and see that there is no part of the Canula above the shoulder of the steel point— It will *not* pass through the skin if there is— Mine caught and I had to file the canula down to the shoulder of the steel.

He concluded the entry with personal encouragement:

I had been sick five weeks and was so weak my limbs could scarcely hold me up—but I grew stronger and did not falter, and after visiting Mrs. Backer with Pope and staying up all night with

her—got home at 4 p.m. of the 3rd better than when I left home. Spunk is good medicine at the right time!

This is a *truism* that each generation of physicians rediscover. Doctor Sheldon's spunk carried him through until May 25, 1880 when he died at age 74. He was buried on his farm.

Doctor Giles James Sheldon, a "back-woods doctor" on the Minnesota frontier deserves the attention given him in our review. He was a man of intelligence, personality, character, versatility, was well-educated, possessed good professional skills for his day, was active in the public life of his community, had ability and above all "spent the coins of his life and talents" in the unfailing consideration of the sick and distressed. He was a valuable asset to southeast Minnesota!

Acknowledgment

Sumner Seward Sheldon, Jr. and his wife Ruth (faithful guardians of history) generously donated Doctor Sheldon's many diaries, account books, professional books, letters and instruments of historical interest and value to the Mayo Medical Library. Their stewardship of these materials made this review possible.

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Jan. 1, 1889

The Sheldon Family.

Caleb Sheldon, Sen., came from Conn. with his family in an ox cart in the early years of the present century, and lived for a few years at the "Old city" in Fairfield where he owned a grist mill.

He was born about 1740 in Providence, R. I., and in early life was engaged with a brother in West India trade, they owning a vessel and making frequent voyages between Providence and the Indies. His brother was lost at sea, and Caleb abandoned seafaring life. He married Chloe Bowen a Quakeress lady of R. I., born in 1756. She was a most estimable lady, of more than average mental capacity, who honored her Quaker principles through life.

Their children were Abram, Caleb Jr., Elihue, and Rhodes. Abram and Rhodes located in Oswego county, at an early day. Elihue lived in Norway, and late in life married Miss Sally Link; one of their sons Harley was living in Mich. recently. Elihue moved to Oswego county about 1850, and died there soon after, leaving other children, whose present residences are unknown. Of Caleb Jr. we will speak later.

In 1809 Caleb Sen. bought 100 acres of Jeremiah Potter Jr., the consideration being, "One hundred pounds current money of the State of New York." The land is described as "in the late county of Montgomery, now Herkimer, on North side of the Mohawk river, in a patent granted to Sir. William Johnson, known by the name of Kingsland or Royal Grant; and is the east 100 acres of lot 4 in the 3rd allotment aforesaid." The land is now owned by William Fox and David Smith. Here Mr. Sheldon came from the "Old City" and lived until death. The original 100 acre farm was enlarged by the purchase of the adjoining Maxon and Ruland farms. Sheldon had made money in his commercial venture, and was well to do as compared with most early settlers. His farm buildings were located where William Fox now resides, and only the barn of the original buildings remain. After he located here he visited R. I., and returning on horse back brought with him a popular riding whip which he divided and

"set out" on the opposite side of the road near his house. They grew to trees a hundred feet in height, as many of our readers well remember, but have disappeared within the past twenty years.

Caleb Sheldon, Sen., died Dec. 24, 1832, being almost 92 years of age, his wife died June 15, 1835, aged 81.

Caleb Sheldon, Jr., was born in Pomfret, Conn., Nov. 19, 1782. After coming to Norway he married Rebeca Giles a daughter of James Giles a prominent early resident near the southern borders of this town. Sheldon was well educated for his day, and a man of marked ability. His occupation was farming and surveying. He surveyed a large portion of the towns of Ohio and Wilmurt and portions of Hamilton county near Lake Pleasant. He held the office of town clerk in 1815-'16 and was prominent in town affairs. The writer has often heard Mr. L. D. Gage while speaking of old residents, say that "Caleb Sheldon was the smartest man that ever lived in town." That he prospered financially is shown by the assessment roll of 1824, when he was assessed \$4,250, on 320 acres of land besides \$700, personal, and paid the largest tax in town save Silvanus Ferris and Henry Tillinghast. The blight of intemperance clouded his latter years. This curse brought sadness and misery to many of the best families of our pioneers. Mrs. Sheldon was a noble, energetic, frugal woman, and to her efforts and influence the education and success of her children is largely due. She died of consumption, Dec. 17, 1834, aged 49 years. Mr. Sheldon died July 2, 1837. Of their family of six children, Samuel C. died in 1821, aged 4 years.

Chlotilda died July 13th, 1829, of consumption, aged 21 years. She was a lovely young woman and her death made a sad break in the family circle. The reader will note that the death angel visited the Sheldon family five times in eight years. Giles J., Almira, Geo. W. and Frances arrived to mature years, and all but the first named are yet living. Frances became the wife of Wyman Trask a lawyer, and native of the town of Russia and who died a few years since at Caledonia, Minn., where Mrs. Trask resides. Two of her sons are prominent business men of that state. Almira married Benjamin Hurd, and were one of the leading families of Norway until 1864, when they sold their farm to David Smith and removed to Rockford, Ill., where they

still reside. Their three daughters are residents of the same state.

Geo. W., born in 1816, was married in 1840 to Elizabeth Scollard of Manlius, N. Y., and a year later removed to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he graduated at a medical school, and practiced in Ohio and Indiana, until 1862, when he was commissioned as surgeon of the 74th regiment Ind. volunteers, and soon after promoted to the position of Brigade Surgeon of the 2d brigade, 2d division, 14th corps, army of the Cumberland. After the war he removed to Michigan where he practiced until his health failed, when he located in LeRoy, Ill., where he now resides. His son Geo. L. is in the mercantile business there. Giles Jr. was liberally educated, graduated at the Fairfield medical college, was principal of the Camden, N. Y., academy about 1828 for a time, afterwards practiced medicine in Ohio, and later in life located in Houston county, Minn., and engaged in farming, in connection with his profession. Here he died about six years since, leaving several children who remain in that locality. He was a man of decided ability. The first temperance society formed in town in 1829, consisted of nineteen young men, of which Dr. Sheldon was the leading spirit. He was its first president, and his able inaugural address covers sixteen closely written pages of foolscap.

In reference to this society we have a letter from Dr. Sheldon, dated Mound Prairie, Minn., Feb. 7, 1878, in which he says "the history of the beginning was this: I was teaching in Camden Academy, when a young man asked me if I had ever heard of a temperance society. I answered him No; as I had not then; but I was sensibly impressed in its behalf, and made up my mind then and there to reach Norway in my best time. In 1829 I could go on foot 50 miles in such a cause. The confirmed topers all spoke ill of us, and argued that we were trying to deprive men of their liberty, but we lived to see 300 members as the records of the society will show. I have so far lived right up to the requirements of the pledge, and am on the earth still, though quite feeble. I shall be 12th of May next, 72 years old, a good age, though I would be glad to beat my Grandfather Sheldon who departed in his 92d year."

The Sheldon family were noted for refinement and social accomplishments. In religious sentiments they were Episcopalians.

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April 17, 1970

Mrs. Ruth Tannenbaum
70 Winding Way
San Francisco, California 94112

Dear Mrs. Tannenbaum:

Enclosed are copies of all the information
we were able to obtain regarding Giles
James Sheldon, M. D.

Holland Patent is a town in New York State.
It's zip code is 13354. Possibly you could
write to the Town Hall there for additional
information.

Sincerely,

Charles A. McGill, Jr.
Director of Alumni Relations
and Placement

CAM:ncs
Enclosure

14. Giles J Sheldon A.B. 1830 Union

Attended Fairfield, sessions 1831-32, 1832-33, 1833-34 from
Norway, Herkimer Co. M.D. 1834

d. Holland Patent 1880

Want middle name

Want place, day, month, & year of birth

Want day and month of death

*No records
from F.C. Waite, Western Reserve*

70 Winding Way
San Francisco, Calif. 94112
March 18, 1970

Alumni Secretary
Union College
Schenectady, New York

RE: GILES JAMES SHELDON, M. D.
Union Class of 1830 - Member, Phi Beta Kappa
Entered College from Norway, New York
Died in what was known as the "Holland Patent" *town*

Dear Sir:

Professor Codman Hislop sent me the above data on Dr. Sheldon, an ancestor of mine, and referred me to your office for further information.

First, what is the "Holland Patent"? Dr. Sheldon died in Houston County, Minnesota, in 1880. I'm bewildered!

I would be interested in any information you might have on him, particularly the first name of his father. There might be some papers written by Dr. Sheldon, for he was a prolific writer and correspondent.

I have his diaries from 1866-1879 that reveal, in great detail, the life of a pioneer doctor. Even in pioneer Minnesota, his inquiring mind and his passionate interest in the problems of his time were certainly a credit to his education at Union. And a real challenge to this great-great grand-daughter!

Any information will be most helpful to me.

Very truly yours,

Ruth Tannenbaum

Mrs. Ruth Tannenbaum

Mrs. Ruth Tannenbaum,
70 Winding Way
San Francisco, Calif. 94112

AIR MAIL



Alumni Secretary
Union College
Schenectady, New York

UCSLat1830sheldon-g-0013

SHELDON, GILES J.

Graduated from Union College - Class of 1830 - AB degree

The following information was taken from the Union College Student Records,
First Term 1827-1828 to Second Term 1828-29 and Third Term 1828-29 to
Third Term 1834-1835, in which Giles J. Sheldon is listed as No. 37

Academic Year 1827-1828 - Junior Year

	First Term <u>Ending December</u> Examination	Second Term <u>Ending April</u> Examination	Third Term <u>Ending July</u> Examination
	(No record for this term- page missing from book)		(No marks for this term)
Attendance		94%	
Conduct		100	
Trigonometry		100	
Mechanics		100	

Academic Year 1828-1829 - Senior Year

	First Term <u>Ending December</u>	Second Term <u>Ending April</u>	Third Term <u>Ending July</u>
-----	No marks for this year		

Giles J. Sheldon A.B. 1830

Giles J. Sheldon

1893
H.B.